

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7708

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AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR NG

SUBJECT: CALL ON PRESIDENT SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL

SUMMARY: DURING COURTESY CALL ON COL. KOUNTCHE, HE EXPRESSED THANKS FOR US ASSISTANCE, SAID FORMER GOVERNMENT'S ACCOUNTING OF PROCEEDS FROM FOOD SALES DEFICIENT, EXPLAINED WHY SALE PRICE US SORGHUM LOWER, APOLOGIZED FOR NOT CONSULTING USG BEFOREHAND AND WAS PESSIMISTIC RE ARRIVAL SUFFICIENT GRAIN IN NIGER AND SO PLANNED REQUEST AIRLIFT.

1. I MET WITH PRESIDENT OF SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL COL. KOUNTCHE MAY 1 AT ARMY HEADQUARTERS. VISIT WAS INTENDED PRIMARILY AS COURTESY CALL AND TO INFORM HIM PERSONALLY OF AMBASSADOR HECK'S ARRIVAL MAY 9. HE THANKED ME FOR CALLING ON HIM AND SAID HE WAS PLANNING TO ASK FOR ME WHEN PROTOCOL TOLD HIM OF MY REQUEST.

2. COL. KOUNTCHE SAID HE WAS PLEASED THAT AMBASSADOR HECK PLANNED TO ARRIVE SOON. IT WAS SMC'S DESIRE THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN US AND NIGER REMAIN CLOSE AND FRIENDLY.

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US HAD SHOWN ITSELF TO BE TRUE FRIEND OF NIGER AND

HE WANTED EXPRESS GRATITUDE IN NAME SMC AND NIGERIAN PEOPLE FOR GENEROUS ASSISTANCE PARTICULARLY DURING DROUGHT. HE SAID FORMER REGIME HAD NOT ONLY MISMANAGED RELIEF OPERATIONS, BUT MANY HIGH OFFICIALS HAD PROFITED ILLEGALLY BY DIVERTING DONOR FOOD SUPPLIES. TWO DAYS AFTER ASSUMING POWER HE HAD ORDERED ACCOUNTING MADE OF PROCEEDS FROM CANADIAN AND FRG FLOUR SALES AND LEARNED THAT ABOUT HALF OF FUNDS WERE MISSING. HE THEN ORDERED INVESTIGATION MADE OF PROCEEDS FROM GRAIN SALES OF OTHER DONORS, BUT SO FAR OPVN HAS NOT GIVEN SATISFACTORY ANSWER. COL. KOUNTCHE SAID HE GREATLY DISPLEASED WITH OVERALL PERFORMANCE OPVN OFFICIALS IN HANDLING RELIEF OPERATIONS. ACCORDINGLY, CAPT. ALI SAIDOU (MINISTER RURAL ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND RELIEF AID) HAS BEEN ORDERED KEEP OPVN OFFICIALS UNDER TIGHT CONTROL. HE PROMISED THAT SMC WOULD GIVE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO RUNNING EFFICIENT, HONEST RELIEF OPERATION AND THAT DONORS COULD NOW HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT THEIR FOOD WOULD REACH THOSE IN NEED.

3. TURNING TO QUESTION OF GRAIN PRICING THE COLONEL SAID HE HAD LEARNED YESTERDAY FROM MINISTER OF ECON AFFAIRS THAT SMC DECISION TO LOWER SORGHUM PRICE (FROM 20 TO 13 CFA PER KILO) CONTRARY TO RECENTLY SIGNED CONVENTION WHICH STIPULATED THAT USG WAS TO BE CONSULTED BEFOREHAND. HE SAID NO ONE ON SMC HAD KNOWN OF SUCH CONVENTION BUT AFTER IT WAS BROUGHT TO ATTENTION OF MINISTER (BY ACTING ADO HILL) HE REALIZED SMC HAD ACTED INCORRECTLY CONCERNING OBLIGATIONS TOWARD USG. HE WISHED TO EXPRESS APOLOGIES FOR NOT CONSULTING US BEFOREHAND. HOWEVER, HE WAS SURE IF WE HAD BEEN CONSULTED WE WOULD HAVE READILY AGREED THAT DECISION WAS JUSTIFIED UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES. SMC REGARDED 20 CFA FAR BEYOND ABILITY OF MOST PEOPLE TO PAY BUT THAT GOVERNMENT NEEDED FUNDS AND COULD NOT AFFORD COMPLETELY FREE DISTRIBUTION. PRICE OF 13 CFA WAS COMPROMISE. HE EMPHASIZED THAT LOWERING OF SORGHUM PRICE (IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER CEREALS) DID NOT MEAN GOVERNMENT WANTED DEPRECATE US SORGHUM BUT RATHER SMC WANTED TO MAKE IT MORE READILY AVAILABLE. HE ADDED THAT ABOUT THIRD OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COUNTRY WAS LIVING TO SOME EXTENT ON AMERICAN SORGHUM. I TOLD HIM I FULLY ACCEPTED HIS EXPLANATION FOR NOT CONSULTING US. I ADDED, HOWEVER, OUR AID OFFICERS FORESAW MARKET PROBLEMS AS RESULT OF LOWERED PRICE, BUT SINCE NEW PRICE HAD ALREADY BEEN ANNOUNCED THERE WAS NOTHING WE COULD DO NOW. HE SAID HE WAS APPRECIATIVE FOR UNDERSTANDING SHOWN AND HE SAID THAT IN FUTURE SMC WOULD TAKE CARE TO ABIDE BY PROVISIONS OF CONVENTION.

4. COL. KOUNTCHE SAID HE WAS SO FAR UNABLE TO GET
CONSISTENT ACCOUNT OF HOW MUCH GRAIN WAS IN COUNTRY
OF
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